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The transformative praxis of Indigenous language revitalization and reclamation educators & L1-based bi-/multilingual educators based on Senegal's national bilingual education reform and Māori revitalization efforts

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Proponents of education for Indigenous language revitalization and reclamation (ELR²) and first language (L1) based bi-/multilingual educators have countless times advocated against dominant monolingual educational policies and practices. This chapter showcases the transformative praxis found in both L1-based bi-/multilingual and Indigenous language revitalization educators, as a decolonial orientation and practice to ensure that learners learn in a language of their communities. It compares Senegal's national L1-based bilingual education reform efforts with the Māori revitalization case. The chapter also discusses the relationship between L1-based bi-/multilingual education and Indigenous language revitalization and reclamation.

1. Introduction

A recent study predicting language endangerment and the future of linguistic diversity globally estimates that approximately 50% of the 7,000 languages documented are in danger and that without intervention, over 1,500 languages could be lost by the end of the century (Bromham et al. 2022). Amongst the languages under threat, most are Indigenous. While Indigenous people represent only 5% of the world population, they collectively speak two-thirds of the 7,000 languages documented (McCarty 2018). Language endangerment, therefore, mostly affects Indigenous communities. With some predictors of language endangerment being the decline of first language (L1) speakers, and schooling in a non-L1 language (Bromham et al. 2022), linguists, Indigenous rights groups and movements, language planning and policy scholars, and bilingual educators advocate for education in Indigenous languages, and other community-led initiatives (e.g., López & García 2016; McCarty 2018; Bromham et al. 2022).

Too often educational interventions or practices have disregarded what already exists and have utilized language ideologies counter to the communities' natural way of expressing and being. This is most palpable in countries and communities where coloniality, ideas of modernity, and development have historically infiltrated educational spaces. These ideologies have very often erected a dominant language as language of instruction and elevated written forms of literacy over other literacy practices, purposefully undermining non-dominant¹ ethnolinguistic communities. These practices often place the onus on non-dominant ethnolinguistic learners and teachers to adapt to these monolingual and dominant standards instead of supporting them in culturally and linguistically relevant content teaching and learning. As Indigenous education scholar and advocate Teresa McCarty (2018) writes, “[e]ducation is arguably the key public domain in which the centuries-long fight for Indigenous language rights has been waged” (p. 93). Schools have been places of language policing and assimilation and they are also being transformed as sites of language rights and Indigenous knowledge reclamation (López 2008) – not without ideological and implementational challenges making the educational space both fertile for possibilities but also limited by constraints (Hornberger 2006).

Likewise, international organizations such as the UNESCO advocate for L1-based Multilingual Education (e.g., Ouane & Glanz 2011; Malone 2018; UNESCO 2020) as means to improve access and quality of education. With the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022-2032), UNESCO advocates for “inclusive, equitable, intercultural, quality education and lifelong learning environments and opportunities in Indigenous languages provided in formal, non-formal and informational educational settings” (UNESCO 2022, p. 18-19) as one of their Global Action Plan outputs. While L1-based multilingual education (abbreviated as L1-based MLE henceforth), and Education for Indigenous Language Revitalization and Reclamation, (abbreviated as (ELR²) henceforth as per McCarty (2020)), are not always synonymous with one another, many L1-based multilingual and Indigenous language revitalization educators have refuted these practices and often take matters into their own hands to enact education on their own terms, and in their own language.

To illustrate the similarity between the efforts undertaken by L1-based multilingual and Indigenous language revitalization educators, this paper compares Senegal's recent L1-based bilingual education reform, which I have documented as part of my dissertation work, to the Māori revitalization case, as documented by Māori scholar Graham Hingangaroa Smith. Smith (2005) has described the Māori revitalization efforts through education as a transformative praxis. By comparing data collected from interviews I conducted in Senegal with Smith's (2005) accounts, I argue that the advocates for L1-based bilingual education in Senegal are also imbued with a similar transformative praxis to the Māori language revitalization advocates as they tackle similar ideological and implementational challenges related to their respective fields. However, before delving into this matter, I begin by clarifying the bounds and overlaps between L1-based bi-/multilingual education and (ELR²).

¹ “Non-dominant” in this context refers to communities of “languages or language varieties spoken in a given state that are not considered the most prominent in terms of number, prestige or official use by the government and/or the education system” (Kosonen & Benson 2013, p. 1). The terminologies “non-dominant” and “dominant” languages help show the power differentials that exist between linguistic communities beyond the simple numerical weight of these languages.

2. L1-based MLE and Education for Indigenous Language Revitalization and (Re)clamation (ELR²)

Often called mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) or simply multilingual education (MLE) depending on the context, L1-based MLE aims to address structural inequalities and defuse assimilationist teaching practices and policies that insist on the sole usage of dominant languages as languages of instruction. Much like the bilingual education's original intention in the United States, Canada, or Europe², L1-based MLE also ensures that speakers of non-dominant languages can access content and learning in their L1s (or a language they understand at minimum). In other words, L1-based MLE programs ensure that the non-dominant language is systematically used as a language of instruction beyond simple "oral explanations or code-switching" (Kosonen & Benson (2013) in Benson 2019, pp. 30-31).

That said, L1-based MLE programs are not solely bound to the usage of learners' L1s. As the term L1-based multilingual education suggests, while it advocates and implements literacy and learning in learners' own languages, it also explicitly teaches dominant languages in an additive approach (Benson 2019). Some examples are the Basque Ikastola Language Project (Benson & Elorza 2015), or most recently the Senegalese NGO ARED's simultaneous bilingual and biliterate program in Senegal (Benson 2022). In the case of the Basque example, students begin by learning in their L1, Basque, while also learning in Spanish (L2), along with additional languages such as French and/or English (Benson & Elorza 2015). In ARED's simultaneous bilingual and biliterate program, students learned in Wolof or Pulaar as their L1 along with French (Benson 2020). Another relevant example would be Dual Language Programs in the United States where content and literacy are taught in two languages, involving a heritage language of the students alongside English, the dominant language.

In this sense, L1-based MLE evades the "either or" dichotomy and aims to build learners' interlinguistic transfer skills on the basis that learners transfer skills and knowledge best when they have a strong oral, written, and analytical foundation in their language (Bialystok 2001; Cummins 2009), with the end goal of having multilingual and multiliterate learners (Benson 2019; García 2008). However, L1-based MLE must not be confused with "programs designed for the elite to learn dominant international languages" (Benson 2019, p. 31) in its ideological orientation. This distinction is important to make. With the internationalization of education, elite programs are also often called bilingual or multilingual programs and bi-/multilingual education has become increasingly associated in the minds of people with programs that favor elites to acquire a so-called "international language," such as English among others. In this regard, L1-based MLE is concerned with social justice and equity in education by providing education in languages learners understand rather than reproducing and strengthening elite education (Skutnabb-Kangas et al. 2009).

To this extent, Education for Indigenous Language Revitalization and Reclamation (ELR²) finds resonance with L1-based MLE as it advocates and implements education aiming to revitalize endangered Indigenous languages, cultures, wisdom, and ways of knowing. Learners in Indigenous Language Revitalization and Reclamation, like in L1-based MLE, learn in and about their Indigenous language and culture. In short, it aims at reversing the language shift and long-standing effects induced by colonialism, which historically sought to eradicate Indigenous people, their language, and culture. McCarty (2020) thus defines ELR² as the "efforts that link home, school, and community in mutually supportive language work informed by a critical understanding of coloniality as the root cause of language endangerment." Her definition expands upon Luis Enrique López and Fernando García's (2016) Education for Language Revitalization (ELR) by placing ELR within an overarching language reclamation framework as for McCarty (2020), "[l]anguage reclamation encompasses language revitalization, taking into account coloniality as the root cause of language shift" (p. 2). In this sense, (ELR²) is primarily discussed in sociolinguistic contexts of language endangerment and death, where Indigenous languages are eroding due to a progressive shift toward a dominant colonial language.

L1-based MLE encompasses language endangerment and death contexts. For this reason, it is common that (ELR²) and L1-based MLE authors often reference one another and cite similar case studies (e.g., Kosonen & Benson 2013; McCarty 2018). However, L1-based MLE also addresses a variety of other sociolinguistic contexts and dynamics beyond those of language endangerment. For example, the Basque or Dual Language programs cited above. There are cases where the L1 is a heritage or immigrant language (e.g., Dual Language Programs in the US as mentioned above), or a spoken language

² Bilingual education advocates in the US warn and prevent the distortion of bilingual education's aims. Bilingual education's original aims are to value and advocate for minoritized learners' languages and cultures in a predominantly White Anglo-Saxon culture and language (Francis & Reyhner 2002; History of Bilingual Education 2006; Nieto 2011)

of a numerical majority which is not utilized as a language of instruction (e.g., Wolof and Pulaar languages in comparison to French, which holds an official status despite being spoken by a numerical minority in Senegal). In contexts like Myanmar, L1 could refer to non-dominant ethnic languages such as Jinghpaw, Mon, or Karenni (to name a few among hundreds others), which are taught to varying degrees in autonomous school systems run by Ethnic Basic Education Providers (EBEPs). Finally, there are also cases - many on the African continent - where certain linguistic communities experience language shifts toward other languages in the area based on inter-group interactions and not toward the dominant colonial language even though they continue to serve as the official language of the country as it is the case in Senegal (McLaughlin 2008). National languages such as Wolof, Pulaar, Sereer, Mandika, Jola, and Soninke face language shifts in contact with one another (more toward Wolof or Pulaar depending on the location) but not necessarily toward French (McLaughlin 2008). Each of these sociolinguistic cases require different sets of interventions to ensure learners have access to education in their own L1 or a language they understand.

In short, L1-based MLE is an “umbrella term for a range of programs” (Benson 2019, p. 30) in which learners have access to quality education in their L1 or language they understand best, including ELR² contexts. That said, contexts of language endangerment and death merit having its own emphasis and focus due to the social, political, racial, and economic erasure Indigenous communities face. As López and García (2016) point out, these contexts require even more attention, constant innovation, and garnering of resources from the home, school, and communities to counter the injustices that subject Indigenous communities to dire situations and reverse the language shift toward the dominant language.

However, there are similarities between L1-based MLE in Global South contexts and certain ELR² contexts. Certain L1-based MLE contexts in the Global South often require advocacy for the non-dominant L1 to be used as a language of instruction, and the development of L1 and bi-multilingual educational materials, especially if there is a generalized belief that the L1 is not considered sufficiently developed or equipped with enough terminologies and materials to teach subjects like math and sciences for example. Usually, such belief is also coupled with the idea that students learning in L1 would have a limited future as higher education and better employment opportunities are rare in L1. In settings that conform to these deficit-based beliefs, educational goals at the family, school, even community then tend to promote an early exit to the dominant language or worse, submerge students in the dominant language as early as possible. These limiting beliefs or “myths” (Benson 2004) are very much prevalent even in contexts where the non-dominant language is spoken by a numerical majority.

Consequently, proponents of L1-based MLE advocate continuously against these misconceptions. To do so, they often take initiative on their own by piloting, developing L1-based bi-/multilingual education curricula and materials, and building the understanding and support within and outside the L1 community. To this end, these challenges and efforts are similar to those encountered in language revitalization programs. They reflect a transformative praxis on which I will elaborate next by comparing interviews I held with Senegal’s L1-based bilingual education advocates and the Māori revitalization advocates’ outlook as documented in Smith (2005).

3. Comparing Senegal’s L1-based bilingual education and the Māori revitalization advocates’ *transformative praxis*

“Au Sénégal, on a compris et on n’attend pas que le gouvernement fasse quelque chose. Nous faisons les choses nous-mêmes. On n’attend pas et le gouvernement est obligé de suivre (Moussa, a Wolof militant, interview, December 10 2021).

“In Senegal, we have understood and we do not wait for the government to do something. We do things ourselves. We don’t wait and the government is forced to follow [us].” (My own translation.)

“We are paddling our own canoe and we are heading in this direction [alternative schooling]. You [Ministry of Education officials] can either get “on board” and come with us or you can stay here and drown. We’re going to go anyway-with or without you! (Tuki Nepe, personal communication, 1988 in Smith (2005, p. 41))”

While reading Smith’s (2005) accounts and analysis of the Māori education and schooling struggles, I was struck by the similarity in attitudes and outlooks between the Māori advocates and Senegal’s self-proclaimed militants of national languages in education. It became particularly salient when the two quotes above were juxtaposed. They strikingly re-

seem one another albeit coming from two different contexts and people. The first quote is from a Wolof language activist I had the privilege of interviewing in 2021 in Senegal as part of my dissertation work on documenting the African language advocacy efforts in education leading to the national bilingual education reform through the lens of self-proclaimed militants. *Militant* in French means advocate with a strong political connotation. The second quote is from the Te Reo Māori scholar and seminal figure of kaupapa Māori educational philosophy, Tuki Nepe in 1988 as cited in Smith's (2005) article. They both invoke similar sentiments about taking matters in their own hands and not waiting for governments to incite change in favor of their communities. These two citations illustrate traits of a transformative praxis.

I borrow the term *transformative praxis* from Māori scholar Graham Hingangaroa Smith who utilizes it to describe their Indigenous communities' struggle for self-determination in New Zealand. Smith (2005) talks about transformative praxis in relation to the Māoris' struggle in developing their own education and schooling starting in the 1980s. He documents the various transformative actions taken by the Māori community to counter the social and economic injustices of their times and the growing commitment of parents to alternative Māori education despite their own negative experiences within dominant Pakeha (White) education and schooling. Smith (2005) reports that over time, Māoris took positions of leadership within their own education and schooling, proactively taking action against educational and linguistic challenges themselves. They created a vision and plan for Māori language revitalization and reclamation, which built better understanding and buy-in from their larger community, contributing to more Māori political conscientization, and critical analyses of society. They also "voted with their feet" (Smith 2005, p. 33), which meant that the Māori would implement their education and schooling where needed within alternative structures, questioning the State's legitimacy and capacity by doing so. These accumulated actions over time led the State to eventually implement and fund Māori-based education and schools. These actions are examples of what a transformative praxis can achieve based on the context of New Zealand.

In Senegal, since 2018, I have had the privilege of witnessing efforts that led to the adoption of the national bilingual education in African languages and French by the Ministry of Education in 2021. In the context of Senegal, African languages are referred to as "national languages" in contrast to French, the "official language." Senegal is a multilingual country, home to 39 living languages (Eberhard et al. 2021). 25 out of the 39 living languages are officially recognised as national languages by the Direction de l'alphabétisation et des langues nationales (Directorate of Literacy and National Languages) (Diagne 2017). These 25 nationally recognized national languages do not include French, Arabic (taught in the daaras, the Koranic schools), or Creole languages. Despite the linguistic diversity and the fact that only an estimated 3% of the entire adult population use French as their first language (L1) and only 29% use French as their second language (L2) (Eberhard, Simons, and Fennig 2019), French has remained the official main language of instruction in formal public education, leading to severe consequences for Senegalese learners³. For many militants, the adoption of this new national policy document called the *Modèle Harmonisé de l'Éducation Bilingue du Sénégal* (MOHEBS) for bilingual education in national languages and French is an important event after five decades of piloting "experimental" programs⁴ (Diop 2017; Iwasaki 2022). This policy stipulates that learners in lower primary will begin learning in a national language and French will progressively be added first orally and then in written form (Ministry of Education 2019). While the policy prescribes, as of now, an early exit model, wherein learners transition to French at the end of primary school, leaving their L1s behind, it marks a milestone for a multilingual country like Senegal. French has been the official language of instruction in formal education, yet it remains a foreign language for a large majority of students and teachers. Like in the Māori case, this reform was made possible by the collective and cumulative efforts of militants of national languages in education.

The militants in Senegal are often linguists, university professors, teachers, adult literacy trainers, media and literary actors, and NGO officers, who have been developing L1-based bi-/multilingual curricula and materials, and L1 terminologies, some as early as the 1950s (Iwasaki 2022). The initiative for change and innovation emerged from speakers

³ According to Senegal's Ministry of National Education (MEN), even after 12 years of schooling, only 44.65% of enrolled students across the country were able to pass the high-stakes baccalauréat examination (high school graduation examination) in 2021, which is also only conducted in French ("Baccalauréat au Sénégal" 2021). Sarr (2013) reports that certain ethnolinguistic communities experience tensions between their own forms of knowledge and languages and the ones disseminated and inculcated at school.

⁴ Senegal experienced various "experimental" programs utilizing national languages since Independence from France. They were led by the Ministry of Education, and many grassroots and local NGOs. One of the most recent "pilot" or "experimental" programs considered to have contributed to this new bilingual reform is the Senegalese NGO ARED's simultaneous bilingual program in Wolof/Pulaar and French. More can be read about this program in Benson's (2022) article.

and scholars of these national languages, who see African language development as a prerequisite to an education representative of their language and culture and thus to liberation from the longstanding effects of colonialism. When asked about their reasons for their commitment, many often shared they went through a realization process akin to a “transformative learning experience” (Mezirow, 1997), which made them question the status quo and realize the colonial ideological conditioning that favors French over African languages. Some had linguistic shaming experiences growing up in the colonial educational system; others could not vouch nor return to a French-only education after learning their national language(s) in adulthood. One self-taught Wolof and Pulaar language professor shared how she had a “retournement fondamental dans ma manière de penser”⁵ realizing how she was “locked up” in colonial languages; another Wolof linguist was emotional recounting what he discovered learning his own language, Wolof, in adulthood:

[...] je sais pas comment te dire. Sincèrement, je suis presque ému. [...] Tu te dis mais comment on n’a pas pu enseigner cette langue ? C’est simplement énorme. [Pause] [...] Et surtout une beauté. [...] tu découvres la sagesse, tu découvres la culture. Tu découvres pleins de choses. [...] (a Wolof linguist, interview, September 1, 2021)

[...] I don’t know how to tell you. Sincerely, I am almost moved. [...] You tell yourself but how is it that we were not able to teach this language? It’s simply outrageous. [Pause] [...] And above all [there is] a beauty. [...] you discover wisdom, you discover the culture. You discover lots of things. (My own translation.)

Such realization, also called *conscientização* in Freirean terms, refers to the process of “learning how to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality” (Freire, 2000, p. 35). Upon such realization, many militants shared how concrete actions such as writing in national languages, teaching L1-based adult literacy classes, and developing bilingual programs and materials, were crucial and most effective to dismantle the longstanding effects of colonialism and advance their national language agenda.

The militants’ comments concur with the Māori experience documented in Smith (2005). Like Smith (2005) who compels academics to “move beyond the mere description of problems and issues” (p. 41), the militants I have spoken with have multiple times called on going beyond what they call a “*militantisme théorique et oratoire*.”⁶ Many lamented the ineffectiveness of the multitudes of seminars, conferences, and workshops organized on the promotion of national languages, much like this militante:

[...] il y a beaucoup de séminaires, de conférences etc., des ateliers sur les langues nationales. Y’a beaucoup de théories. Moi je dis que je ne suis pas pour ce militantisme théorique et oratoire. [...] Parce que tout ce qui a été dit, quand tu vois tous ces documents de 1976 jusqu’à maintenant, tout ce qui est en train d’être répété, a déjà été dit dans ces années-là. C’est le même discours qui revient. Moi, je ne suis pas pour ce genre de militantisme. On organise les conférences, des ateliers sur la promotion des langues nationales... C’est très bien mais moi je suis plus pour un militantisme actif. Action citoyenne, c’est-à-dire quelque chose de concret. C’est pour ça en fait que ce que je fais actuellement... Là je suis en train de faire beaucoup de cours, lecture écriture, en wolof, pour le wolof, que je donne gratuitement à qui veut. (a Wolof militante, interview, June 21, 2021)

[...] there are a lot of seminars, conferences etc., workshops on national languages. There are a lot of theories. I’m saying I’m not for this theoretical and oratory advocacy. [...] Because all of what has been said, when you see all these documents from 1976 up to now, everything that is being repeated has been said over these years. It is the same discourse that comes back. I’m not for this type of advocacy. We organize conferences, workshops for the promotion of national languages... This is very good but me, I am for an active militantisme. Active citizenship, that is something concrete. That’s why I do what I do these days... Now I am teaching a lot of classes, reading and writing, in Wolof, for Wolof, which I am teaching for free for whoever wants it. (My own translation.)

Exasperated with lip service and empty policies that do not implement the change, many shared that they prefer to model, and enact the changes through concrete action, whether it were holding adult literacy classes in L1s, translating known novels into Wolof or Pulaar, writing novels and newspaper articles directly in Wolof or Pulaar, or developing

⁵ “a fundamental reversal in my way of thinking”

⁶ “a theoretical and oratory advocacy”

teaching and learning bilingual materials in both national languages and French.

4. Conclusion

“Liberation is a praxis: the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it” (Freire, 2000, p. 79).

While the Māori and Senegalese examples do not mean to account for all the efforts being made in ELR² and L1-based MLE, they both give us a glimpse into the power of transformative praxis, and how “the action and reflection of men and women” as mentioned by Freire can transform educational policies and institutions. Both cases show that challenging oppressive colonial systems and creating alternatives to the status quo are led by individuals who learned “how to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality” (Freire, 2000, p. 35). In the case of Senegal, most militants report having a “transformative learning experience” (Mezirow, 1997). Once they learned their own national language in adulthood, they were unable to reconcile their frame of reference (i.e., education in French only) with their newly found reality. They could not ignore the injustice of being barred from learning in their own languages, which drove them to advocate for more just policies and practices.

However, as both cases emphasize, it is not sufficient to simply have a “transformative learning experience.” As Smith (2005) writes, “[t]here is a need to move beyond mere description of problems and issues to making sure that change does in fact occur” (p. 41). In this sense, the two quotes earlier from the Wolof militant and Māori scholar and advocate Tuki Nepe have the same concern. They both do not wait for governmental institutions to incite or enact the change. Rather, they both call for action to set an example that will define and enact new sets of norms. Militants in Senegal run adult literacy classes in national languages, develop teaching and learning bilingual materials and curricula in national languages and French; Māori educators develop Māori language immersion schools where parents take their children - already embodying the change that needs to occur. In both cases, governmental changes ensued after accumulated efforts over time and various people committing to piloting, running schools and educational programs, and bringing more people into the cause.

In honoring Indigenous and non-dominant ethnolinguistic communities’ struggles, their histories of resistance, and their transformative praxis, their liberation leads to a transformed world for all. These collective and individual stories remind us that the world is experienced differently depending on power and historical legacies, and we may wish to reflect where we stand and how we can participate in this transformative praxis. In the realm of education, for educational programs and schools to play a transformative and critical role, they must address the power imbalances and effects of historical legacies founded on these power imbalances. Education must reckon and reflect Indigenous and speakers of non-dominant languages’ struggles and challenges, their histories, languages, cultures, and aspirations. Only then will we collectively experience a transformed and liberated world, true to the diversity of its inhabitants.

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